

Remarks  
COL David J. Clark  
Dedication of the Kansas City, MO Memorial  
28 September 2011

Thank you, Colonel Johnston. Dignitaries, distinguished Veterans, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. On behalf of the leadership of the Department of Defense and the entire staff of DoD's 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Korean War Commemoration Committee, thank you for your generous invitation to be a part of today's program.

It is humbling to stand here today and be among so many distinguished Veterans. Your experiences, your sacrifices and your accomplishments make you imminently more qualified than I to understand the significance of this occasion. Today you are receiving recognition that you richly deserve, that is owed to you by your country and your fellow citizens; honors that you paid for in full decades ago in a far off, foreign land, and that by any man's measure, is long overdue. You see, the more I study and reflect upon the Korean War and its historical implications, the stronger my conviction becomes, that the world and this nation owe you a unrepayable debt for your service in what we now rightfully call the Forgotten Victory.

Because of you and others like you, the Republic of Korea stands today as a shining example of democracy and freedom and a beacon for other emerging nations around the globe. Just like the Phoenix of mythology, the Republic of Korea has risen to dizzying heights from the ashes and destruction of back-to-back wars to become one of the most prosperous nations on the planet and the envy of the world over. That is your enduring legacy. So in the quiet moments of your later years, when you think back on your sweat, and your blood, and the tender memories of young comrades-in-arms who gave everything; remember the nation and the people who live free of tyranny and in prosperity because of this noble effort – and know that it wasn't for nothing – it mattered then and it matters now...you and your friends who never came home are heroes and will never be forgotten.

The occasion for which we have come together is actually a tradition that is thousands of years old; a tradition that dates back to the glory days of Rome. This magnificent memorial will transcend time as it attests to the valor of more than 900 service members from the great state of Missouri who laid down their lives in a war many have called forgotten; and it will stand as a permanent reminder to future generations of the real cost of freedom. Like the thousands of memorials to all the wars this nation has fought since 1776, it will be emblematic of America's covenant with her men and women in uniform, that she will honor their service and selfless sacrifice as long as this republic stands.

Wherever they are found throughout the world, memorials pay homage to a nation's heroes. They remind us of men like James H. Schultz, a Marine, who landed at Inchon, fought in the battle to liberate Seoul and experienced the horrors of combat at the Pusan Perimeter and Chosin Reservoir, two of the most costly battles in the Korean War.

James Schultz envisioned a memorial that would stand as a testament to those who served in the Korean War; an enduring monument for all to see; one that would reflect their sacrifices and that would never be forgotten. Today we see the fulfillment of that dream, brought to fruition by the dedication of his family and friends. The memorial we will shortly unveil was secured at a very high price: not in terms of dollars and cents but in terms of lives lost and lives forever changed by a terrible war; a war that was brutal and uncompromising.

As you well know, it has taken a long time for historians to call what happened in Korea a "War." Over the years it has been called a "police action" and it has been called a "conflict." Even worse, it's been labeled the "forgotten war." That is most certainly a misnomer...for I'm certain that none of the living men and women who served there will ever forget it.

In fairness, most of these labels were not intended to denigrate those who served, but for political reasons, both domestic and foreign, "police action" and "conflict" were terms that were more palatable to the American public and to UN member nations. They were terms meant to downplay the

scope of our actions for a world still suffering from the painful memories of World War II. But of course, the unintended consequence was that the label “Forgotten War” stuck, and perhaps, not intentionally, but in point of fact, seemed to have the effect of somehow diminishing the importance of this chapter in American history.

Historians are just now beginning to understand that the Korean War was a major turning point in modern political history. As we connect the dots, from Korea to Vietnam to the collapse of the Soviet Union, to the rise of China as a regional power, it has become strikingly clear that the decision to defend Korea was an emphatic line in the sand to Stalin, Mao and Kim Il-Sung and in the end, a ringing victory for the United States and its allies and especially for the people of the Republic of Korea.

Seventeen years ago, at the dedication of the national Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, Kim Young-Sam, then president of the Republic of Korea, described the Korean War as “a war worthy of remembrance.”

For the next few minutes, I’d like to propose those five simple words - a war worthy of remembrance - as a theme for today’s dedication.

I’m sure those of you in the audience today would agree that there is much that is worth remembering about the war. Worth remembering are the almost one million UN forces, including South Koreans, who were killed, wounded or missing. Just think; these staggering losses occurred during a three-year period in an area just slightly larger than your neighboring state of Kansas. US casualties totaled 54,246 men, including 33,000 killed in action; 102,000 wounded; and almost 8,000 whose remains have never been recovered. Among those still listed as missing in action are 176 men from Missouri. For the families of these sons, husbands, fathers and brothers, the vigil will continue until their loved ones have been accounted for.

It is also worth remembering that the Korean War was the first test of the fledgling United Nations. History tells us that there was almost universal skepticism when this world body was first established. The question

around the world was, “Would the UN succeed where the League of Nations had failed?” Back then, no one really knew. But what we did know was that failure in Korea was simply was not an option.

Equally worth remembering is the spirit of selfless sacrifice and valor embodied in the 135 men who earned the Medal of Honor during the Korean War. Two of those recipients had roots right here in Kansas City: Staff Sergeant Charles R. Long, US Army, 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, and Corporal Jack A. Davenport, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division.

Many of you know Davenport’s story. As a squad leader he was directing the defense of his position during an attack by hostile forces trying to infiltrate the area. An enemy grenade landed in the foxhole he shared with another Marine. Corporal Davenport threw himself on the grenade saving his companion from serious injury or possible death. For every Medal of Honor recipient there were hundreds who received little or no recognition; but their courage and dedication to their fellow comrades-in-arms are worthy of remembrance.

For the next few moments, let’s go back in time to September 1951. The War had broken out a year earlier; but despite horrific allied casualties, the war had not yet become a reality for most Americans. After all, the Great Depression was still in the minds of many and World War II was still a very real national memory. Quite frankly, Americans were ready to turn the page to a new era of prosperity and consumerism.

Here in Kansas City, as elsewhere throughout the nation, you were enjoying new, life-changing innovations...air conditioning, microwave ovens, and television, to name just a few.

And while Americans listened to popular artists like Nat King Cole and Elvis Presley on the radio and watched I Love Lucy and The Lone Ranger on TV, thousands of miles from home her sons were engaged in an epic struggle at a place aptly called Heartbreak Ridge. When the fighting finally stopped, UN forces had prevailed but at a cost of 633 dead and 2,530 wounded.

Americans' ambivalence could be attributed to a number of factors: For one thing, the War seemed so distant and so foreign. The names of Korean towns were unfamiliar and difficult to pronounce...names like Soyang River, Chup'a-ri, Chipyeong-ni and Taeusan; Kumsong, Panmunjon and Pyongyang.

Moreover, the Korean War had little impact on the everyday lives of Americans, especially when compared with the sacrifices required for victory in World War II; a fact that was not lost on the troops. Their frustration was articulated by a son of Kansas City, Private First Class Eugene Shields. In an interview with a reporter from the Kansas City Star, PFC Shields observed, "Most people with relatives seem to be in there pitching like they should. But," he went on to add, "American Soldiers fighting in Korea want to see persons back home take more interest in the war."

I find his comments to be as relevant today as they were 60 years ago.

Indeed, much has changed since September 1951. Back then, there were no personal computers, no cellphones...no Facebook or Twitter. And when you came home, there were no parades; no guest appearances on variety shows; no national media events. Nevertheless, nothing will ever diminish your stunning accomplishments on the Korean peninsula and the victory there continues to reverberate through the years.

As I take my seat, I leave you with the words of one of our nation's great poets, Ralph Waldo Emerson. In his eloquent poem, "A Nation's strength," Emerson captures the spirit exemplified by our Korean War Veterans who served with distinction but without fanfare. He wrote,

What makes a nation's pillars high  
And it's foundations strong?  
What makes it mighty to defy  
The foes that round it throng?  
Brave men who work while others sleep,  
Who dare while others fly...  
They build a nation's pillars deep  
And lift them to the sky.

To all the Korean War Veterans here today, for your courage, selfless sacrifice and a shining victory that grows more luminous with time, the United States Department of Defense and the grateful people of America and Korea honor you and thank you for a victory that is worthy of remembrance.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am grateful for the opportunity to share this extraordinary experience with you. God bless you. God bless America. And God bless our men and women in uniform who stand watch today on the Korean Peninsula and around the globe.

Thank you.